

FINAL STATEMENT: FORMATORS' SEMINAR

'SPIRITUAL FORMATION OF PRIESTS'

Assumption University, Bangkok, Thailand

14th-19th November, 2010

1. Introduction

We, 76 priests, involved in the formation of seminarians and clergy, were accompanied by 3 Archbishops/Bishops from 9 countries: India, Indonesia, Myanmar, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Laos, Viet Nam and Australia. We gathered for a seminar titled the "Spiritual Formation of Priests". We met from 14th- 19th November 2010 at the Suvarnabhumi Campus of the Assumption University in Bangkok, Thailand. The purpose of this seminar was to examine three central objectives:

- A. To help priests face the challenges of the ever-changing society of the modern world.
- B. To search for relevant spiritual formation for priests of Asia
- C. To strengthen the spiritual life of priests.

2. Challenges

We live in a region which is socially, culturally, politically and religiously diverse. The process of globalization has also witnessed the rapid economic development of many nations in Asia which has led to a widening gap between the rich and the poor. These developments have created the view that the value of a person can be bought and sold as any commodity. This utilitarian view of the human person can be witnessed in human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation as well as in the rise of corruption, political instability and civil disturbances. These views are not unique to Asian culture but reflect a process of secularization that has led to the development of worldwide phenomena of hedonism, consumerism, relativism and materialism. There has also been a realization that the process of urbanization has changed the dynamics of social and cultural life in families. The formation of relationships between young people through the use of modern forms of communication has become modeled on forms of constant availability and connection with the world but not with their inner self. This can even create an addiction to technologies which does not aid the reflection of the individual and which actually isolate them from the community to which they are called to belong.

We recognize that the priest, as part of a community, can be adversely affected by the changes in the way that society values the human person. This can cause them to call into question their motivation and dedication to the mission of Christ as ordained ministers. Priests face the dilemma of remaining true to the traditions of the Church while also being engaged with the world of today. For us who have the responsibility for the formation of priests there is a need to discover how we may act as animators of the

Word who touch the hearts of people who seek to discover whether God is calling them to ordained ministry.

3. Emerging Insights

a. Being And Acting In The Person Of Christ

In our discussions we touched on how we seek to live as a Church which experiences the totality of the Paschal Mystery. This touches not only how we shape our understanding of Christian spirituality but also how it finds expression in the life of the priest and the community which he serves. Often the tendency towards uncritical syncretism and the accommodation of the daily realities of living within society can erode the sense of priestly identity and more seriously his personal intimacy to experience God in the market place. At times, these changes have led to a consumerist approach to the life of the priest who is called to administer the works of God but is not transformed by them. This lack of authentic witness saps the energy for mission and raises doubts in the mind and heart of the priest: can he be a man of integrity who is called to be present and available to God and his people? A sense of joy and liberation can be lost if a sense of relationship with Christ is not internalized in the life of the priest; he is called to be and act in the person of Christ to live the mystery he celebrates at Eucharist.

b. Heart To Heart

The theme was further developed in how a priest is called into the mission of Christ, in a heart to heart relationship, not solely through being an ordained minister but by being totally immersed in the mystery of Christ beginning at baptism. The priest in this situation not only learns about Christ but is to receive Christ as a person who transforms his life and way of being in the world. He is called to be missionary in the way that the Gospel becomes incarnate in time and space. Mission is not a seed which is to be stored but rather a seed that is to be planted in the priestly heart. The priest bears witness to Christ by allowing himself to become who he is called to be as a man deeply immersed in the love of God for the good of the world. For him to live is to evangelize. This was developed through the use of six models of priestly ministry relevant to Asia: these give expression to the desire to be present to Christ in the world. A priest in Asia is called to be a : Witness to the Divine; Man of Dialogue; Servant Leader; Prophetic Presence; Reconciler and Bridge Builder; and Living Icon of Christ.

c. Live What You Celebrate

We reflected on how the local Church into which a diocesan priest is incardinated is called to recognize the charisms present in the community so as to build up people as witnesses to Christ's presence in the world. In areas which are culturally and linguistically diverse there can be difficulties in recognizing how the Spirit of God may be uniquely present within a particular diocese and a particular parish community. There can also be a tendency in which the difference between communities can emphasize a sense of division or separation from others. This can lead to incompleteness in discovering a unity of purpose which gathers a People of God into a communion of faith in solidarity with each other and with their Bishop. The diocesan priest is called to examine how he can be present as a person who seeks to live the Eucharistic life in all these relationships. The diocesan priest is called to live what he celebrates. In the very act of kissing the altar of life he becomes priest, victim and altar in and through Christ. He is the person called to become contemplatively present to Christ in the offering of his whole life. The diocesan priest is called to be no

other than himself within the context of the communities in which he is called to live and minister. He is a person who is moved by the spirit and acts in the name of the Church. The diocesan priest discovers a spirituality which is lived in the midst of people, becoming a transformed community in union with Christ. Through his availability and presence his life expands into the love of God, into the love of self, and into the love of the community.

d. Creating A Culture Of Contemplation

We became aware that a priest needs to be a person of contemplation. He is not only a person who seeks to gaze on the face of God but also a person who is loved into being by God. The formation of a person in and through this divine contemplation shapes the individual to become the sign and instrument of God's love for the world. The lives and example of Saint John Mary Vianney and Blessed Joseph Vaz present striking images of God's transformative power: the contemplation of this mystery transformed these persons and the environment in which they were called to exercise their ministry. They provide true images of the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the flock. This is an act of pastoral charity which involves a willingness to share in the life of the poor through the total gift of self for the building up of the reign of God among his people.

e. Fully Human And Fully Alive In Christ

We became conscious of the fact that a priest is called to be a person who builds a healthy spirituality on the basis of a healthy humanity. Grace builds on nature in the life of each individual. The formational process supports and assists the development of human qualities especially in the area of relationships. Formators need to be people who discern their own needs and the needs of the people they form. The formators strive to become persons who experience an integration of their own psychosexual needs and who can provide a process of good vocational pedagogy for the seminarians they guide. This focuses not only on the motivation of a seminarian wishing to enter into a process of formation but is also open to how this person has developed his own identity in the context of their own family, schooling, environment and community. This has become of critical importance in not only highlighting the issue of clerical sexual abuse but in focusing on how a person develops a healthy celibate sexuality which enhances priestly spirituality. There needs to be a provision within formation programs whereby seminarians can discuss openly and honestly their sexual feelings and be guided positively to deal with such issues in a constructive way. The essential purpose of the formation process should be for a seminarian and priest to become a man of faith, hope, love, humility, fidelity, obedience, courtesy, integrity, prudence, penance, patience, simplicity and joy. The priest is called to become a person who is fully human and fully alive in Christ.

f. Man Of Prayer

We acknowledged that the journey into the human psyche has developed in many ways over the twentieth century. While there were initial attempts in psychology to separate this pursuit from a religious context there was recognition that a person's search for meaning was an essential element of human life. A vital part of this search is the discovery of the truth of our identity in God. This identification can have profound influences in a person's behavior and how they grow humanly and spiritually. In order that prayer is part of the life of the seminarian and priest he needs to share the rich experiences of prayer. Through creating a habit of prayer which meets the needs of the person he can become altruistic in allowing the will of God to take place in their life; to belong to God and his Church; to be guided by the Spirit; and to have hope

sustain their journey in priesthood and Christian living. This develops a sense in which a person can be responsive and receptive to God.

4. Commitments

As a body of Bishops, Priests and Formators gathered for this seminar we have grown in awareness that the development of a healthy spirituality in the life of people in formation of seminarians and priests becomes a crucial part of our lives. This is not simply a responsibility given to us but a mission entrusted to us by Christ for the good of the whole world. Our consciousness and witnessing to God's presence is the keystone and foundation of our formation as pastors of the human soul. This choice freely taken and joyfully embraced in our Lord Jesus Christ commits us the participants of this graced occasion to undertake the following actions in the service of God and our people:

1. To become people of contemplation and prayer by witnessing to the presence of God's love through our actions.
2. To act as people who collaborate with Bishops and the local Church in the mission of proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ
3. To make seminaries a sacred place of prayer and learning which enrich and enroll the lives of those in formation to become intimately committed to the person of Christ and his mission.
4. To seek healthy formation of priests through priestly fraternity, quality friendships, retreats, recollections, study groups, review of life and renewal within each diocese.
5. To assist priests to become people who display integrity in their life and ministry
6. To encourage people in discernment of the charisms that God has given them for the good of the world.
7. To assist people in their discovery of their missionary vocation entrusted to them in baptism.
8. To create a directory of places in Asia which assists priests to become effective formators